Reflections

August 8, 2020

Tactical Pause

Every once in a while, an article shows up out of nowhere to add clarity to the situation in which Monroe Institute finds itself. Today, “Amid Crisis Is the Best Time to take a Tactical Pause” was in my mailbox from *Chief Executive* magazine. I didn’t know the magazine, but the title got my attention.

We’ve been working flat out to create a sustainable online division of Monroe for the last four months. We now have a “minimal viable product” in our virtual retreats and the processes that support their adaptation and implementation. The post-participation survey results are stunning. We’ve some refining to do. And, we’re light years from where we started.

We’re about to go out and raise a boatload of money to build the permanent infrastructure for this division. In the process, we need to take a pause to be sure we know exactly what we want to be when we grow up. We decided last week that we need to take a tactical pause to gauge the wind and set our sails so we adjust everything on our Monroe boat to assure ourselves we’re headed in the right direction.

Make no mistake: We had to act quickly. There was no choice in our direction and the speed with which we had to accomplish our tasks. We had to be online and the date was “yesterday.” Toward that end, we have performed magnificently. In the space of 13 weeks, we created a million dollar division outa’ nothin’. That just doesn’t happen in real life. Yet, we did it. Stand up and feel proud. I am extraordinarily proud of all of you and what we’ve been able to accomplish.

Back to the article. Written by Lt. Gen. Frank Kearney [ret.] (and others), he makes some interesting points. A summary follows. Please overlook the military lingo in favor of the good ideas.

“The military has a process to help train soldiers to make difficult decisions — decisions that can have a big impact on the overall mission of the organization — in conditions they call the “fog of war”…It is contrarian to think that, during a crisis when time is of the essence, it is best to take a deliberate pause. But that is exactly what the military trains leaders to do.”

“A tactical pause allows us time to get a cross cutting set of options from fellow leaders and subordinates who have expertise in aspects of the situation; they are the team who built the plan and contingencies.”

“Message alignment and consistency is critical, and our people and stakeholders want to know what we are doing and planning.”

“In the military we learn to “go slow to go fast.” Leaders, in most crises, can make better decisions by taking a deliberate pause, to assess what has gone right, what has gone wrong and choose a better path forward.”

Now interim CEO for Draper Labs, Frank Kearney articulates his goals as, “We are balancing multiple priorities and clearly articulating them to our organization, board of directors, clients and stakeholders. I outlined my priorities as taking care of our people’s health and welfare and meeting our commitments to our clients as our two interdependent priorities. Third is maintaining our corporate economic viability, and, lastly, maintain our employee’s economic welfare. Our brand will be tested. We have formed process action teams to look at near-term crisis actions and at our strategic future, through key investments that drive our corporate future relevance. Balancing required capital investments against …the benefits is a key action.”

In order to move forward in his new position, Kearney created a 120-day planning team to address near-term challenges and future opportunities. He is also instituting a daily email communication to the entire workforce.

Here’s his summary of what leaders need to do:

• Be confident and trust your teammates. Fear and confidence are contagious. Choose confidence.

• Communicate directly, often, with honesty.

• Synchronize organizational activities at least daily, add to your battle rhythm.

• Convene or reconvene your strategic planning team to: refine what post crisis future may look like and relook the facts and assumption, which your current business plan is based on.

• Keep stakeholders informed of your planning and crisis adaptations. Invite them to participate. Seek their views.

• Monitor and redirect key resources and capture the data. This is round 1 of the [planning] so do an AAR (After Action Review, aka an assessment) to prepare for round 2-3.

• Be empathetic to your people; their emotions range between anxiety and fear.

• Ask yourselves four questions:

1. What do we know?
2. What do we think we know?
3. What do we need to know?
4. How will we gather the information to answer these questions?

• Lastly, ask, what are we learning and who are we sharing it with?

This is a long way to say, Monroe is on the right track. We've decided to take a pause to take an assessment and assure ourselves of the steps we need to take in order to effectively and boldly move forward to a future where we make the most impact possible on our rapidly expanding roster of participants.

From Kearney: "I submit that during any chaotic and uncertain environment, every organization can benefit from a pause in execution. When leaders deliberately allow their team to take a break, slow down, gather lessons, and redefine the way ahead they will find that things inevitably run more smoothly. At the individual level, they will be a better version of themselves if they take time each day to stop, look, listen, and smell."

Here's the links to the entire series:
Part 1: *https://chiefexecutive.net/amid-crisis-the-time-is-right-to-take-a-tactical-pause/*
Part 2: *https://chiefexecutive.net/going-slow-to-go-fast-how-to-conduct-a-tactical-pause/*

It's time to take a break and enjoy each other's company. Take time to appreciate what we've accomplished and plan for even more extraordinary accomplishments ahead.

Have a wonderful weekend.
See you Monday.

In heartfelt appreciation,
Scott